

Wildlife Express!

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Coyote

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Crafty Coyote



Let's Look at Coyotes

No matter where you live in Idaho chances are that a coyote is not far away. Coyotes are found all across Idaho. They are adaptable. This means they are an animal that can live in many different types of habitats. They are found in deserts, grasslands, forests and in the mountains.

One thing that makes coyotes so adaptable is that they will eat just about anything. They mainly eat small mammals, like mice, ground squirrels and rabbits, but they will also eat dead animals, birds, snakes, lizards, fruits and berries. Coyotes have been known to steal tomatoes and other vegetables from gardens!

Coyotes are the second largest wild dog in Idaho. They weigh between 20 to 45 pounds and measure 30 to 40 inches long. They have a bushy tail and large ears shaped like triangles that help them listen for danger and for food. The long, skinny legs of a coyote help it to move. Coyotes can run up to 40 miles-per-hour! That is faster than the speed limit on a city street. They also can leap. Jumping over an eight foot fence is nothing for a coyote.

The scientific name for the coyote is *Canis latrans*. This means "barking dog," and they do use sound to communicate. Coyotes make a yippy kind of howl. The howl is used to let other coyotes know "this is my area." The yelp is often heard in play. It is used to celebrate or criticize the actions of another. Coyotes bark to tell others to stay away from their den or food. A low huff is used to call pups.

Not only howls are used to mark coyote homes, but smells are used, too. They urinate on bushes or rocks and have a scent gland at the base of their tails that they rub on things. Coyotes mark their territories, but they usually only defend them when they have pups.

Coyote pups are born in dens. Coyotes may dig their own den, or they may use an old badger or fox home. Usually six to seven pups are born. At birth, pups weigh only one-half of a pound. They are helpless, blind and have limp ears and pug noses.

When they are about 10 days old, their eyes open, and their ears start to straighten and stand up. They stay in the den and drink mother's milk until they are about three weeks old. Then they begin to wander out of the den and eat meat regurgitated by the adults. By the time the pups are five to seven weeks old they no longer drink their mother's milk and start to learn to hunt. They are the size of an adult when they are nine to 12 months old.

The first year of life is the riskiest for a coyote. Only one or two out of 10 coyote pups will live to be one year old. Some are killed by predators, like wolves or mountain lions. If a coyote does survive its first year, it may live to be around 10 years old.



The Dog Family

Members of the dog family are called canines. Worldwide there are 34 species, or kinds, of canines. Members of this family include wolves, coyotes, foxes, jackals and African wild dogs. The domestic dogs that we keep as pets first came from wild dogs.

What comes to your mind when you think of what a wild dog eats? Meat? Wild dogs do eat meat. Mammals, frogs and snakes are on the menu, but they also eat other things. They may eat eggs, insects, nuts, and fruits. Canines that live near people will eat garbage!

Canines may not be as fast as some of the animals they hunt, but they can often run for a longer time. Dogs have great endurance. They can run for long distances without getting tired. One way they catch prey is to keep the animal running until it gets so tired it can't run any longer. Then the canine can grab the animal around the neck and pull it to the ground. A single animal may not be able to pull large prey to the ground, so wild dogs often hunt in groups. They also are medium-sized. You won't find any wild dogs as small as a Chihuahua!

Wild dogs are found on every continent except one, Antarctica. We have nine species of canines in the United States, and four of those live in Idaho. We have gray wolves, coyotes, red foxes and kit foxes. Kit foxes are rare and only found in the southern part of the state. They are the smallest member of the canine family. They weigh between three and six pounds and are only 18 to 21 inches long! The gray wolf is the largest canine in Idaho. Wolves weigh between 70 and 110 pounds and can be over six feet long. They are huge!

If you see a canine in the wild, you may see it acting like your pet dog or a friend's dog, but remember – it is still a wild animal. Like all wild animals, canines need to be respected and observed from a distance.



Myths, Legends and Fables

Many myths, legends and fables have been created about animals. Maybe it's because animals are so cool! You know about myths, legends and fables, right? They are old stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Many of these stories began before history was written down.

A fable is a story that is told to teach a lesson. Fables are about animals or plants that act and talk like people. The story about how tortoise won the race against the hare is an example of a fable.

Many people use the terms myth and legend in the same way, but they are different. A legend is a made-up story about people and the things they have done. Legends are usually not about animals. Legends are stories based on facts about historical people. These stories have been blown out of proportion to teach a lesson. The story of Robin Hood is an example of a legend. There really was a man named Robin that lived in Nottinghamshire that helped the poor. Did he live in a forest with a bunch of merry men and rob people? Probably not, but helping people is the message that is remembered.

A myth is a story about nature and how nature works. Myths are designed to teach. They try to answer questions that people have about how the world came to be or why things happen in nature. Native peoples around the world shared myths, and they became part of their culture and beliefs. They became sacred.



Native Americans developed many myths about coyotes. In their myths, coyote is seen as god-like. He has the power to come back to life after dying and has the power to create whatever he imagines. Coyote is a teacher and creator of Earth and people. At other times, coyote is a clown or trickster. He is foolish, boastful and selfish. Coyote stories help to teach balance between good and bad. Read the myths on the inside of this issue. What was being taught with these stories?

Coyote and the Swallowing Monster "A Nez Perce Story"

One day, long before there were any people on the earth, a monster came down from the north. He was a huge monster, and he ate everything in sight, including the chipmunks, mice, deer and mountain lion. Coyote decided the time had come to stop the monster. He went across the Snake River to the highest peak in the Wallowa Mountains. He hid in the grasses and shook them.

"Is that you Coyote?" howled the monster.

"Yes, it is me!" shouted Coyote. "I bet you can't swallow me up!"

The monster challenged Coyote to suck him up first. Coyote took a big breath, but the monster only quivered a little bit.

"Now it is my turn," said the monster. He took a big breath and soon Coyote was flying through the air. Before the monster could suck in Coyote, he dropped camas roots and service berries. "Soon the human beings will come. They will need food to eat."

When Coyote got in the monster, he saw that all of the animals were safe. He told them to get ready to escape. With his flint and pitch, he built a huge fire in the monster's stomach. The monster began to feel sick. "I knew I shouldn't have swallowed you Coyote. Oh, you give me heartburn." Then Coyote took his knife and cut the monster's heart out. The monster died a great death, and all the animals escaped.

Coyote then began to cut the monster into pieces. He threw the pieces all over the Northwest and created human beings. "You people near the sunrise. You will be the Sioux and Flathead. You people near the sunset. You will be the Cayuse and the Umatilla. You peoples near the cold will be the Coeur d' Alene. You peoples near the warmth. You will be the Bannock and Paiute."

When he was finished, Fox said, "Hey brother, what about the people for right here?"

"Oh, Fox," said Coyote. "I knew I need to make the people for right here. I just forgot." So then Coyote took the heart of the swallowing monster and squeezed the blood out and sprinkled the drops on the ground. "Here on this ground I make the Nez Perce. They will be few in number, but they will be strong and pure. They will have a very big heart."



* Adapted from A Nez Perce Nature Guide, I Am of This Land, by Dan Landon and Jeremy Crow and Oh! That Coyote: Native American Tales for Reading Aloud, by Susan Strauss.

Coyote and the Grass People

"An Assiniboin Story" (Great Plains Tribe)

That day, Coyote was loping along. He was feeling big about himself that day. He had brought salmon to the Columbia River. He had killed a great monster. He was feeling SO BIG about himself that he started bragging: "It is a very good thing that I am doing. Soon the two-leggeds will be coming and they will say, "how smart that Coyote is."

All of the sudden, he heard it - a song! Someone was singing off somewhere, softly. "Wwww ... we are the strongest people in the world."

"Who is singing that?" asked Coyote. He looked around. No one was there, so he went on walking.

The voices came again. "Wwww ... We are the strongest people in the world."

"Who is singing that?" asked Coyote. No one was there! Coyote put his nose into the grasses and started sniffing around.

The song came again. "We are the strongest people." It was the grasses! Yes! All the grass people were singing softly together. "We are the strongest people in the world."

"Ah!" said Coyote. "You grasses? Ha! You think you are stronger than me? No! I, Coyote, am the strongest one in the world, and I'll prove it to you. I'm going to eat you!"

Coyote pulled up a bunch of the grasses and gobbled them down. "You see, I have eaten you! That proves that I am more powerful than you!"

But just then, inside Coyotes stomach, the grass people began to sing again. They sang, "We are the strongest people in the world, because we will make you fart!"

"Hunh!" said Coyote. "That is nothing for a great chief like me." And he went on his way.

After some time, there came a little one. Pooh!

"Hunh!" said Coyote. "So that is your power? That is nothing for a great one like me."

After a while there came a bigger one. Pooooh! It actually lifted Coyote off the ground.

"Hunh!" said Coyote "That is nothing ... nothing for a great chief like me." He went on his way.

Then there came a ... POOOOOH! It shot Coyote way up into the air and WAM! He hit the ground.

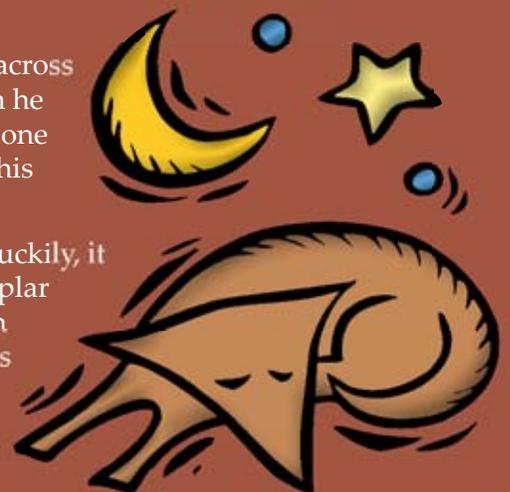
"Oooo!" said Coyote. He had bruises on his rump and legs.

POOOOOOH! There came another one, and it shot Coyote way up into the air. WAM! "Oooo!" said Coyote.

Now you see, soon Coyote was rocketing himself up and down across the Great Plains, and he was getting black and blue. So, once, when he hit the ground, he ran over to a grove of poplar trees. He wrapped one arm around one tree and one arm around another and held on for his life. There he was. "POOOH! POOOH! POOOH!" exploding away.

As he fired away, the trees started to pull loose from the earth. Luckily, it finally stopped, and Coyote went on his way. But, if you look at poplar trees today, you will see. They look as if someone tried to pull them out of the ground. They look like that because Old Man Coyote was there, passing on the grass people's power.

* Adapted from Coyote Stories for Children, by Susan Strauss



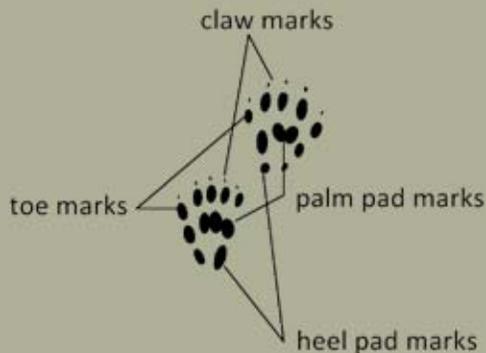
Tracks, Tracks, Tracks!



BE OUTSIDE

Winter is a great time to look for animal tracks. Tracking can be a lot of fun. It's a bit like playing detective. You observe, gather clues and do your best to put the clues together to solve a mystery. It also can be difficult at times. Here are some tips to consider when figuring out what animal left a track.

Look at the track from all directions. Notice the size of the track and its shape. Mammal tracks are usually made up of marks left by the claws, toes, palms, heels and the space in between the toes and pads. Not every track will show all of these things, of course. It all depends upon the animal, and what the animal was doing at the time the track was left. This is what a spotted skunk track might look like:



How many toe marks show in the track? Weasels have five toes on both the front and back feet, but sometimes only four toes leave marks. Hares have four toes only on their back feet; the front feet have five toes.



In tracking guides, toes are numbered one to five beginning with the inside toe and moving outward. The smallest toe (#1) is usually found on the inside of most mammals' feet. This can help you tell if a track is from the left or right foot of an animal.



The front legs of dogs actually have five toes! The first toe is found high up on the leg, so you don't usually see it in a track. Coyote tracks usually have four clear marks left by the toes, and the front foot tracks are always larger than the rear foot tracks.



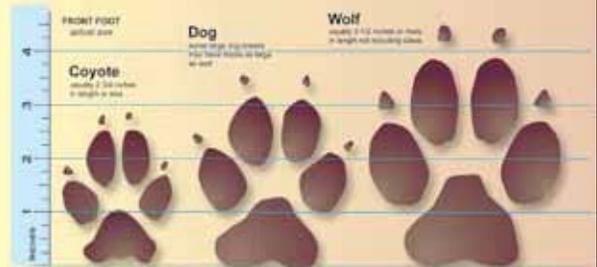
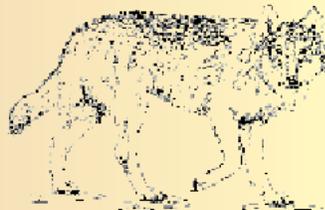
It is very tricky to tell coyote tracks from the tracks left by a pet dog, but there are a few things that can help you tell the difference. Dogs usually have claws with thick, blunt tips, because people trim their dog's claws. The trimmed claw makes a "fatter" mark. Coyotes have sharp, pointy claws. The marks they leave are fine and thin. The marks left by the two outer toes of the coyote hit so close to the two inner toes that it can be difficult to see the claw marks at all.

These are just some of the things to consider when looking at tracks. The mammal track comparison chart below will help you tell some tracks apart. At least you may be able to tell what family the animal is from. Good Luck!

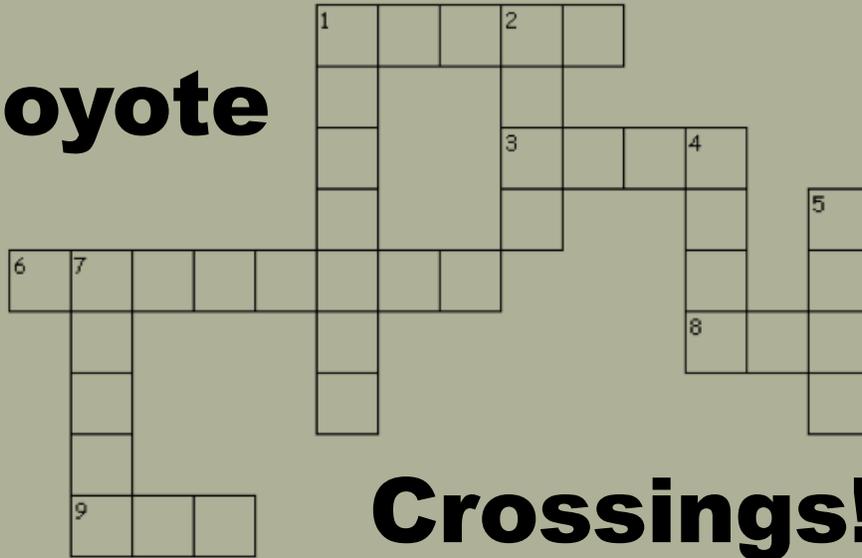


Mammal Family Track Key

Toes	Claws	General Shape & Outline	Common Gaits	Shape of Pads	Family
4	Yes				Dog
4	No				Cat
4 or 5	Rare				Rabbit
4 or 5	Varies				Rodent
5 th toe may not show	Sometimes				Bear
5 th toe may not show	Sometimes				Weasel
5	Sometimes				Raccoon
5 (are tiny)	No				Shrew
2	Dew Claws				Deer



Coyote



Crossings!

Words

Adult
Dens
Four
Habitats
Howl
Myths
Run
Ten
Mammals
Wolf

Across

1. Coyote is a popular character in Native American _____.
3. This is an animal that may kill a coyote.
6. Coyotes can live in many different _____.
8. A coyote may _____ 40 miles-per-hour.
9. Pup's eyes open when they are about _____ days old.

Down

1. Coyotes mostly eat small _____.
2. Coyotes use this sound say "this is my home."
4. Idaho has _____ species of wild dogs that live in our state.
5. This is where coyotes have their young and rest.
7. Young coyotes reach _____ size when they are nine to 12 months old.

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